

take prompt actions so that the House may consider this legislation early in the Congress.

This bill is almost identical to the legislation passed by the House during the 105th Congress by a vote of 412-0. The VA Committee learned as a result of its investigative efforts that the practice of allowing burial of persons who did not meet Army regulations prescribing eligibility for burial at Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) had become the subject of serious controversy. Further, the practice of allowing burial of persons without military service at ANC has caused considerable anguish on the part of members of military and veterans organizations. As a result, the VA Committee recommended this legislation to codify existing burial regulations for ANC with two significant changes. First, there would not be authority to grant exceptions, or "waivers," under the proposed legislation. No one—not the Superintendent of ANC, the Secretary of the Army, or the President of the United States—could authorize the burial of a person who is not eligible under the proposed legislation. However, Congress could enact subsequent legislation on behalf of an individual whose accomplishments are deemed worthy of the honor of being buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Second, this bill eliminates the "politically well-connected" category of eligibility now found in existing Army Regulations. Under existing Army regulations, veterans who do not meet the military criteria for burial at ANC are nevertheless eligible if they served as a member of the House or Senate, as a Federal judge, a diplomat, or a high-ranking cabinet officer. This legislation eliminates future eligibility of such persons so that Arlington will once more be the final resting place for those with distinguished military service.

As indicated, this bill passed the House by an overwhelming margin and had the active support of all the major veterans service and military organizations. Unfortunately, the other body did not debate the issue during the 105th Congress. By introducing this bill and planning for its early consideration by the House VA Committee, we hope to give the Senate ample opportunity to consider it and reach agreement on what the nation's policy should be on this issue of abiding importance to veterans and their families.

EXTENDING COVERAGE OF THE FMLA

HON. WILLIAM (BILL) CLAY

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 6, 1999

Mr. CLAY. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing legislation to expand the protections afforded by the Family and Medical Leave Act. The bill I am introducing is identical to legislation I introduced in the 105th Congress, H.R. 109.

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) grants employees the right to take unpaid leave in the event of a family or medical emergency without jeopardizing their jobs. As a former Chairman of the Subcommittee on Labor-Management Relations of the Committee on Education and Labor, I was privi-

leged to work closely with the Hon. MARGE ROUKEMA, Senator DODD, Senator BOND, our former colleagues the Hon. Pat Schroeder and the Hon. William D. Ford, and many others to bring about the enactment of this important law. Necessarily, however, many compromises were made to bring about this precedent setting legislation.

Among the most important of those compromises was one that limited the applicability of the law to employers of 50 or more employees. My original intention had been to extend the law to employers of 25 or more employees. However, because of uncertainty regarding the impact of the law on employers and in order to increase support for the legislation, I agreed to accept the 50 employee threshold.

The effect of this compromise was to leave tens of millions of employees and their families outside of the protections afforded by the FMLA. In fact, only 57% of the workforce is protected by the FMLA. The fact that an employee may work for an employer of 40 rather than 50 people does not immunize that employee from the vicissitudes of life nor diminish that employee's need of the protections afforded by the FMLA. For my part, this was a very difficult and reluctantly entered compromise. However, it was my hope at that time that experience under the law would prove that the law does not unduly or unreasonably disrupt employer operations.

The FMLA was signed into law on February 5, 1993. Experience has shown that the law does not unduly disrupted employer operations. Not only are the costs to employers of complying with the law negligible, but in many instances FMLA has led to improvements in employer operations by improving employee morale and productivity and reducing employee turnover. Experience has also shown that the protections afforded by the law are not only beneficial, but are essential in enabling workers to balance the demands of work and home when faced with a family or medical emergency. In short, we have now had sufficient experience under the law to justify extending the law to employers of 25 or more employees.

Beyond expanding the number of workplaces that are protected by the FMLA, the bill I am introducing would permit employees to take parental leave to participate in or attend their children's educational and extracurricular activities. In effect, employees subject to the FMLA would be able to take 4 hours of leave in any 30-day period, not to exceed 24 hours in any 12-month period, in order to participate in important educational activities undertaken by their children. In this way, the law would more effectively enable workers to meet parental responsibilities without sacrificing their economic security.

Despite the enactment of the Family and Medical Leave Act, too many workers continue to face an impossible dilemma, pitting the emotional and physical well-being of a family against its economic security, when faced with a family or medical emergency. Enactment of this legislation would extend coverage to 73% of the workforce. A mother should not unreasonably or unnecessarily be forced to choose between caring for a new born and maintaining her job. A husband, recovering from a heart attack, should not also needlessly face

the loss of his job and the resulting financial insecurity that would mean for his family.

Requiring employers of 25 or more to provide temporary, unpaid leave to workers who face a family or medical emergency will not impose an unreasonable burden on those employers. Such a modest expansion of the law, however, will significantly benefit families in crisis by extending the protections of the FMLA to 15 million workers and their families. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this important legislation.

THE GUN SHOW SAFETY & ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

HON. ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 6, 1999

Mr. BLAGOJEVICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of 25 of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to reintroduce the Gun Show Safety & Accountability Act, the nation's first legislation aimed at closing a deadly loophole that allows criminals to purchase firearms at gun shows without undergoing Brady background checks.

While it is unfortunate that my bill was not acted upon by the 105th Congress, it is our hope that with new leadership and a showing of bi-partisan support, the 106th Congress will pass this legislation and help me to cut off the deadly supply of firearms to violent criminals that result in the countless deaths of innocent American citizens every year.

When a person buys a handgun from a gun store, they must fill out a Brady Form, undergo a background check, show proof of identification and a record of the sale is also kept. What most people don't know is that a loophole in the federal law allows that same person to buy a handgun at a gun show without doing any of these things.

The gun show loophole has created a situation that is both dangerous and unfair. It allows gun show participants to sell guns with little, if any, legal obligation to insure that they aren't putting deadly weapons into the hands of violent criminals or juveniles. Furthermore, it creates unfair business competition between law-abiding gun store owners whose time-consuming background checks and sales records are much less attractive to potential customers than a quick purchase from a gun show participant.

Hundreds of thousands of firearms are sold at gun shows every year, and experts believe participation to be on the rise. As gun shows have grown, so has evidence illustrating that a lack of regulation is creating a black market for violent criminals. Knowing that background checks would prevent them from buying guns from a gun store, criminals have found that they can obtain unlimited numbers of firearms at gun shows with ease. Because no sales records are kept at gun shows, these firearms can be resold on the street and used in crimes without being traced.

A one-year study conducted by the Illinois State Police indicated that at least 25 percent of illegally trafficked firearms used in crimes originate at gun shows, and national news accounts indicate similar situations across the